Complimenting behaviour on Facebook: Responding to compliments
in American English [Post-print version]

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Abstract

Compliment responses in face-to-face interaction have been extensively studied in different languages and cultures. Studies on complimenting behaviour in virtual contexts are beginning to emerge (cf. Cirillo 2012; Placencia and Lower 2013; Maíz-Arévalo 2013). This paper aims to contribute to this emerging body of work by examining the responses to compliments made on Facebook by a group of women within a Facebook network in the US. While they received 1057 compliments, they produced only 205 responses. These results contrast with findings for face-to-face interactions where non-response is exceptional, suggesting a strong influence of the medium on social norms. Observational data from FB is supplemented with data from interviews with a group of Americans in order to explore appropriateness of non-response behaviour from FB users' perspective. Regarding compliments which were responded to, acceptance predominated over rejection, in line with previous work within English-speaking communities (Holmes 1986; cf. Herbert 1989; Mustapha 2011).

Key words: compliment responses, social networking, Facebook, American English, computer-mediated discourse

1. Introduction

Compliments and the responses they elicit have been extensively studied in different languages and cultures (see Chen 2010, for an overview). While compliments can perform a range of functions such as mitigating certain face-threatening acts (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987[1978]: 74-75), after Manes and Wolfson's (1981) influential work on compliments in American English, it is generally accepted that they form part of a social ritual that enables speakers to generate and maintain rapport. Compliment responses are similarly restricted by the need to fulfil a social purpose and, in responding, the complimentee faces certain dilemmas, first

identified by Pomerantz (1978) (see Section 2). If a compliment in a face-to-face interaction is designed to offer affiliation, then rejecting it would surely be rude. However, accepting a compliment too wholeheartedly might seem arrogant. In addition, as pointed out by Holmes (1986, 487) compliments can be perceived negatively: as expressions of flattery or even envy. These factors explain the range of compliment responses observed in English and other languages, from acceptance in the form of appreciation tokens, for example, to outright rejection.

Internet interactions, which are characterised by both asynchronous and polylogical communication (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004; Marcoccia 2004), appear to offer at least one other alternative: that of ignoring the compliment altogether. How participants respond or choose not to respond to compliments in such environments is the focus of this study. More specifically, this paper examines compliment responses on FB in American English, using the the same corpus employed by Placencia and Lower (2013) for the analysis of compliment realisation, and builds on previous studies on compliment responses (see Section 2). While there are numerous studies focussing on compliment responses in face-to-face interactions, complimenting behaviour in social-digital environments has not received much attention. Thus, it is of interest to explore the extent to which practices that have developed for face-to-face interactions are adopted in digital environments and whether any new practices are emerging. As we will aim to show, the medium of the interaction appears to have a strong influence on compliment response behaviour and the social norms that guide users in their choice of strategy. The questions that we seek to address in this paper are the following:

1. What is the frequency of compliment response observed in the FB corpus under examination?
2. What do FB users consider to be appropriate behaviour with respect to (non)-response to compliments on FB?
3. In responding to compliments,
   a) Which strategies (i.e., accepting, rejecting, or evading) and sub-strategies (e.g. expressing agreement, questioning sincerity, etc.) are most commonly employed?
   b) Do participants produce individual or collective responses and, where responses are individual, do participants use the names of those they are responding to, that is, is there any evidence of addressivity (Werry 1996)[1] (see Section 4.2.2).

2. *Studies on compliment responses*

Pomerantz (1978, 81), in her classic qualitative study of compliment responses in American English, observes that although acceptance of a compliment is considered to be the preferred

response, "a large proportion of compliment responses deviate from the model response". Other types of response, such as rejection, are far from uncommon. This author describes the situation in terms of three constraint systems operating in conjunction with a system of preferences. When a compliment is given, the recipient can choose to either accept or reject it. This is the first constraint and it provides speakers with two opposing response strategies: acceptance or rejection. However, the recipient of the compliment can also evaluate the compliment and choose to agree or disagree with it. This second set of constraints is strongly aligned with the first since acceptance is often performed by agreement while rejection is often achieved via disagreement with the compliment.

The third constraint is that of self-praise avoidance. As mentioned above, Pomerantz considers the preferred response to be that of compliment acceptance. This, however, is in conflict with the desire to avoid self-praise, as the only way that self-praise avoidance can be achieved in conjunction with either of the other two constraint systems is by rejection/disagreement. Pomerantz contends that a system of preferences which favours acceptance operates alongside the three constraints. To address the problem posed by the contradiction between preference for acceptance and self-praise avoidance a set of solutions is required leading to the range of compliment response strategies observed by Pomerantz and other authors. These strategies are summarised in Figure 1.
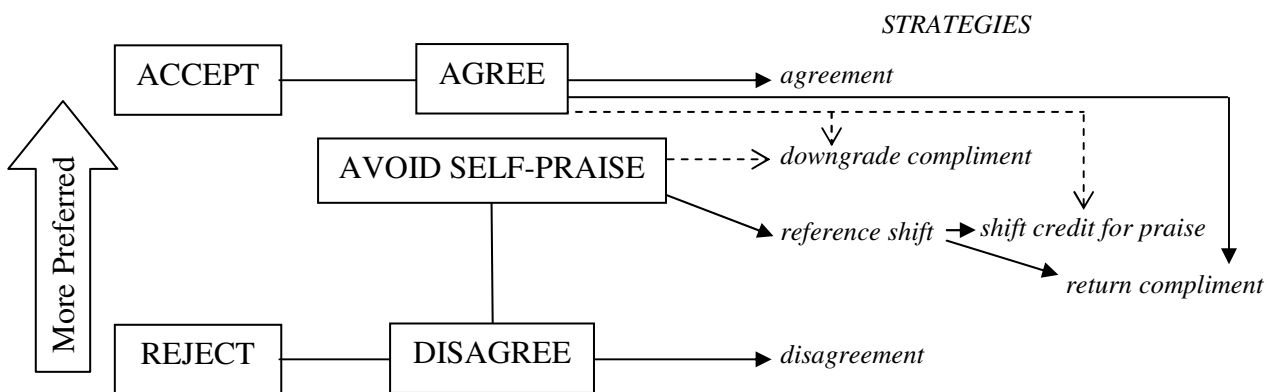

Figure 1: Summary of Pomerantz's (1978: 83-106) constraints operating on compliment responses. The alignments between constraints and how they are perceived in terms of preferences lead to a range of possible response strategies. Strategies coming from complete fulfilment of constraints are indicated by solid lines and arrows. Those solutions which attempt partial fulfilment of constraints are indicated by dotted lines.

Other authors have considered the dilemmas of responding to compliments in terms of politeness. For instance, Holmes (1986) made a link between compliment responses and Brown and Levinson's (1987[1978]) notion of face needs: a desire to be liked (positive face) and a

desire for self-determination (negative face). In this theory, a compliment presents a potential threat to both positive and negative face since rejection is rude and acceptance is arrogant. Chen (1993), on the other hand, suggests that two of Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, agreement and modesty, can be used to explain motivation for either accepting or rejecting a compliment. Acceptance of a compliment adheres to Leech's (1983) Agreement Maxim (minimise disagreement; maximise agreement), whereas rejection is interpreted as an observance of Leech's Modesty Maxim (minimise praise of self; maximise dispraise of self).

It should be noted that the politeness theories discussed by other authors in this context were developed for face-to-face interactions. The digital-social environment is a new and evolving context. Thus, in our work, we have interpreted our key results drawing on notions from more than one model of politeness and social interaction (Section 4). This is similar to the approach taken by Arendholtz (2013) in another online context and we feel that it is necessary to account for the complex phenomena encountered online.

Compliment responses have been widely studied in different varieties of inner-circle English (cf. Kachru 1985). Among the first are Holmes (1986) and Herbert (1989) who examined compliment responses in New Zealand, and South African vs. American English, respectively. Both based their classification of response strategies on Pomerantz's (1978) constraints; however, there are some differences in approach (see Section 4), meaning that caution is required when comparing the two studies. Referring back to Pomerantz's (1978, 80) contention that the preferred response to a compliment in American English is acceptance, a striking finding of Holmes (1986) and Herbert's (1989) studies is that while this does indeed seem to hold for New Zealand and South African English speakers (61% and 76% of compliments, respectively, were accepted), this was not the case for American English speakers. In the latter case, only 32% of compliments were accepted and evasion was the most common response strategy at 45%.

More recently, Schneider (1999) looked at compliment responses in Irish and American English in relation to Chen's (1993) now classic study on compliment responses in Mandarin Chinese. Schneider found that Irish English speakers used a greater variety of response strategies and, uniquely amongst native English speakers, favoured rejection over any other strategy. As such, on the acceptance-rejection continuum, speakers of these different varieties of English could be placed as represented in Figure 2:

ACCEPTANCE ◄──────────────────────────────► REJECTION

South African English   New Zealand English   American English   Irish English
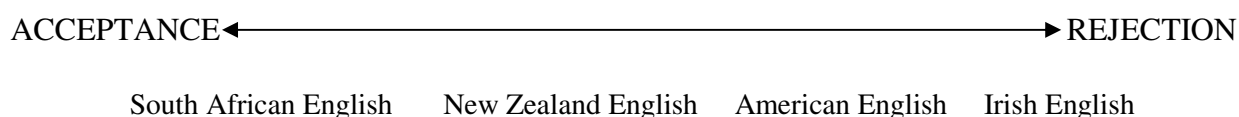
Figure 2: Compliment response acceptance-rejection continuum for varieties of English

The study of complimenting behaviour in English has also been extended, albeit in a limited way, to outer-circle varieties of English (Kachru 1985). Mustapha's (2011) study on Nigerian English is an example of this type of study. Drawing on Holmes (1986) and Herbert (1989), amongst others, Mustapha's (2011) work shows a striking predominance of compliment acceptance (94%): the highest rates of compliment acceptance observed in any study of English speakers.

A cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective involving a contrast between English and a different language (variety) (e.g. Syrian Arabic and Mandarin Chinese) can be found in a number of studies such as Nelson, Al Batal and Echols (1996) and Tang and Zhang (2009). The results of these studies show that compliment response strategies are influenced by cultural and linguistic factors. Broadly speaking, Western cultures favour acceptance while Eastern cultures more frequently reject compliments. However, this may be changing in some Eastern societies as evidenced by Chen and Yang's (2010) study on complimenting responses in China: acceptance is becoming a more prevalent response, as a result of increasing contact with the West. Gender variation in compliment responses has also been identified in some of these studies (cf. Lorenzo-Dus 2001).

Finally, with respect to the medium of interaction, computer-mediated discourse (CMD) is a burgeoning area of research in which to explore mundane interactional activities and the ways in which different online media influence social norms. Social media such as FB, for example, offers many opportunities for the giving and receiving of compliments. However, to date, research on complimenting behaviour has focused largely on face-to-face interactions; our work thus represents one of the first studies to tackle this form of social interaction online. Others include Placencia and Lower's (2013) study on compliments on FB in American English, Cirillo's (2012) study on compliment responses within Second Life,[2] where English is the lingua franca, and Maíz-Arévalo's (2013) study of FB in Peninsular Spanish.

Cirillo's (2012) corpus consisted of seventy-four compliment/response pairs taken from interactions collected from Second Life. While her work is not directly relevant to the present study because it looks at compliments within a gaming environment, some of the conclusions she draws are of interest: particularly that users of Second Life are substantially more likely to not respond to a compliment than speakers in the off-line world. Indeed, Cirillo found that 17.6% of compliments given were not acknowledged in any form, and noted also that many users would not make any further comments after receiving a compliment, possibly indicating that they had gone off-line (Cirillo 2012, 49). The author differentiates between these and non-responses where the recipient shifts topic. In addition, she finds that the rates of agreement in

responding to compliments are much higher than in off-line interactions and records a significant incidence of users employing two opposing strategies within one compliment response (6.8% of the compliments in her data), as in Example 1 (Cirillo 2012, 51), which combines an initial acceptance with two instances of rejection.

(1)
[03:59]**S.B.:** *nice AV*	an "AV" is not explained – Avatar?
[03:59]**V.N.:** *mine?*	Rejection: question sincerity
[04:01]**V.N.:** *oh thanks*	Acceptance: appreciation token
[04:01]**V.N.:** *i'm blushing*	Rejection: ironic comment
[04:01]**V.N.:** *ahaha*	Rejection: topic shift

Interestingly, Cirillo treats all use of irony as a form of rejection, adding it as a new category in Herbert's (1989) taxonomy.

Cirillo (2012) suggests that the use of two conflicting response strategies may represent users' desire not to offend while also showing modesty, thus complying with both of Pomerantz's (1978) constraints simultaneously. On the other hand, the high incidence of non-response and acceptance/agreement is, for Cirillo, a product of the virtual environment: the anonymity afforded by the online environment allows users to feel comfortable breaking the usual rules of conversation and politeness. Unafraid of losing real-life face, they are free to ignore compliments and indulge in self-praise.

Maíz-Arévalo's (2013) work on compliment responses on FB in Peninsular Spanish is more directly relevant to our study. Her corpus comprised data from 8 individuals selected from a FB community of 58 participants. The 8 members selected for her study (4 males and 4 females) appear to have been hand-picked rather than chosen at random. A total of 177 compliments were collected and participants were questioned about their use of FB by means of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews.

As with Cirillo's (2012) Second Life participants, Maíz-Arévalo observes that FB users display a high level (30%) of non-response and that when they do respond, they prefer strategies that are unique to the medium, making the patterns of response very different from face-to-face interactions. Like Cirillo's (2012) work, Maíz-Arévalo's aims to show how communication styles are being adapted and moulded by the new medium.

Comparison between the studies discussed is hampered by the use of at least two different ways of categorising compliment responses. As indicated above, Holmes (1986) and Herbert (1989) use Pomerantz's (1978) constraints as a starting point and go on to identify three main response types: acceptance, rejection and evasion (Holmes 1986) and acceptance, rejection and 'other interpretations' (Herbert 1989). In subsequent studies, most authors use

Holmes (1986) and/or Herbert's (1989) taxonomies, introducing their own modifications in some cases in order to reflect the individual nature of their own corpus. The complexity of compliment responses makes their categorisation problematic and there is some cross over between those responses counted by different authors within their categories. For example, returning a compliment is considered an acceptance by Holmes (1986), whereas Herbert (1989) describes it under 'other interpretations'. There is also the difficulty of many responses naturally falling into at least two categories, most commonly an appreciation token (e.g. 'thanks') and one other as in these examples from our corpus:

(2) A picture of F7's[3] daughter with a sparkler:
Female   *This is an awesome picture!*

F 7   *Thanks, A! It's one of my favorites.*   (thanks and agreement)

(3) A picture of F168 and her new baby:
Female   *you're soo pretty & i looove your hair.! & your baby boy is soooo adorable :)*

F168   *Awhh thanks, your pretty too:) and I love your hair :)* (thanks and compliment
                return)

Further, Holmes's (1986) and Herbert's (1989) taxonomies are both derived from a corpus of English compliment responses, not surprisingly posing problems in their successful application to other languages. For example, Nelson, Al Batal and Echolos (1996) uncovered specific linguistic formulae used in Syrian Arabic which were non-existent in English. To overcome this and other issues, Nelson, Al Batal and Echolos (1996) developed their own classification system, building on both Holmes' (1986) and Herbert's (1989) systems.

Likewise, Cirillo (2012) and Maíz-Arévalo (2013) used adapted versions of Herbert's (1989) and Holmes's (1986) taxonomies, respectively. Both authors added categories in order to better reflect the patterns of behaviour present in their corpora. The two authors, however, differ in their approach to the treatment of those features of the responses which are specific to CMD such as the representation of non-verbal elements of communication. Cirillo (2012), who employs Herbert's taxonomy, chose to fit these features into the existing structure of that taxonomy. For example, she places instances of laughter (eg: *"heheh"*), into the "change of topic" category, defined by Herbert as a form of rejection. Maíz-Arévalo's (2013) data perhaps contained a wider range of these features, from emoticons to the use of "Like" and she categorises them all as non-verbal responses. She uses Holmes's (1986) taxonomy and argues that what she terms non-verbal phenomena are outside this taxonomy. According to Maíz-Arévalo, they are not online analogues of face-to-face phenomena, that is, online forms of acceptance, rejection or evasion, but something separate requiring their own, separate nomenclature in the taxonomy. We prefer to term the features described above as "medium-

specific" and take the view that these sorts of response can be interpreted within the existing frameworks for analysing compliment responses, as we will attempt to show in Section 4.

Finally, both Cirillo (2012) and Maíz-Arévalo (2013) treat the non-response to compliments as a separate category of response, seeing it as a facet of the online environment. Having said this, they do seem to interpret its meaning differently. Cirillo (2012) presents a lack of response as a manifestation of how the online environment frees users from accepted norms of behaviour (i.e., impoliteness carries no social penalty). Maíz-Arévalo (2013), on the other hand, suggests that the absence of a response actually originates in a desire to adhere to Leech's (1983) Modesty Maxim. Broadly speaking, our study supports Cirillo's interpretation in that we argue that there are different expectations of behaviour online, but there are some instances where modesty seems to play a part in the perception of (in)appropriate behaviour on FB among participants in our study.

3. *Methodology and ethical issues*

Two data sets were employed: observational and perception data from interviews. Regarding the former, we used the same corpus as in Placencia and Lower (2013). This corpus comprised compliments addressed to 10 women randomly selected from a group of 187 women, members of Lower's FB network of family and friends in the US (for details of how the corpus was generated, see Placencia and Lower (2013)). Women were chosen as they were found to receive more compliments than men, in line with previous studies (cf. Manes 1983). However, it would also be of interest to look at complimenting responses by men in a future study.

FB users post photos in their profile wall and their photo albums. We examined responses to compliments on photos posted by the 10 female participants in both places. These photos elicited a total of 1057 compliments and 1346 'Likes'. In the present paper we focus on the responses to the 1057 compliments. We do not examine responses to 'Likes' here, as it is not in fact possible to respond to 'Likes' within the FB platform. A user would need to write a new comment which could then be 'Liked' or commented on.

The participants selected for this study ranged in age from 18 to 62 at the time that the data was collected. They represent a relatively uniform group in terms of social background: the majority (70%) have at least a first university degree, and all of the participants have lived in the same Midwestern state at some point in their lives for at least three years. The majority of participants (90%) are white, and one is of Hispanic origin. A future study, however, may consider focusing on users with particular social/educational or ethnic backgrounds and/or age groups.

In terms of ethical matters, following the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) guidelines, as well as institutional guidelines, we sought and gained informed consent from the participants selected to use the information in their profiles for the present study. Also, to protect their privacy in the examples we provide, we did not use any of their names, instead allocating an alphanumeric code to each participant (F1, F2, etc. for females, and M1, M2, etc. for males). We have also replaced other users' names appearing in the examples with either 'Male' or 'Female'.

In order to complement our findings from observational data and in an effort to gain some understanding of compliment response behaviour on FB from users' perspective, informal, semi-structured interviews were carried out by the first named author with 15 Americans (8 females and 7 males), studying different subjects at a university in the Midwest. The students came from these states: Iowa, Nebraska and Illinois. They were all white except for one African-American participant and their ages ranged between 18 and 40. The majority were doing their first degree, with 4 doing a second degree. The interviews centred around the exploration of appropriateness of non-response behaviour on FB (see section 4.2.3). For ease of access, the interviews were carried out with university students rather than working professionals. However, some of the students at least had had a professional life before going back to university. The interviewees are referred to within the text as male 1-7, and female 1-8. The age of the interviewee is also indicated next to the interviewee number (e.g. male 2, 38).

4. Analysis

We start this section with a consideration and description of the categories employed in the present study (4.1), followed by the results (4.2) which include a consideration of general patterns identified and a comparison with other studies (4.2.1), an analysis of response types (4.2.2), style and frequency of response (4.2.3) and perceptions of appropriateness to (non)-response among FB users (4.2.4).

4.1.   Categories employed in the present study

For the present study, we chose Holmes's (1986) taxonomy of compliment responses. Despite this taxonomy having been developed for face-to-face interaction, we found it suitable for the analysis of compliment responses in the online environment of FB. It provided an adequate, yet flexible, framework within which to categorise the data sample. As we discuss in the following section, many responses were extended and complex. Other compliment response coding schemes such as Herbert's (1989) were found to be too rigid and did not allow for a satisfactory way to deal with FB phenomena.

The use of Holmes' taxonomy was not problem-free. Thus it has been necessary to make some modifications, as indicated in Table 1 below, where we provide examples from our FB corpus. Holmes' taxonomy includes the subcategory 'questioning accuracy' as a form of compliment rejection (e.g. "is beautiful the right word?" Holmes 1986, 492). No examples of this subcategory were found in our data and so it has been omitted from the present analysis.

Table 1: Taxonomy of responses based on Holmes (1986)

Type of Response	Examples taken from present study	
Acceptance	Appreciation token: • thanks, • LOL, • 'Like' + further comment, • :) + further comment.	(4) F64's kids with cousins: Female: *Those are some cute kids!* F64: *Thanks Female!!* :)
	Agreement token: • yes, • I think so too, • you're right.	(5) F4 with another friend, making excited faces: Female: *I love this picture!!!!!!* F4: *Yeah, I love it too*
	'Like' with no further comment.	(6) F161's dog: Female: *Ahhh love him* F161: 'Like'
	Emoticon with no further comment.	(7) F168's new baby: Female: *awwwwwwwh hes such a little heartbreaker F168!!!* (: F168: :)
	Downgrading utterance: acceptance indicated through agreement or appreciation with an additional comment shifting credit or qualifying the compliment.	(8) F161's dog: Female: *Cute!* F161: *Thanks, <u>I can't take the credit</u>, but that's my baby!*
	Return compliment: acceptance indicated through agreement or appreciation with an additional comment complimenting the other party.	(9) F168 and new baby: Female: *you're soo pretty & i looove your hair.! & your baby boy is soooo adorable* :) F168: *Awhh thanks, your pretty too*:) *and I love your hair* :)
Rejection	Disagreement utterance: • I don't think so, • I don't like it.	(10) F31 and friend: Female: *holy cleavage!!! whoa! but cute!* F31: *Haha. Funny. I was <u>thinking the exact opposite</u> about me!*

	Challenging sincerity: suggesting that the compliment giver does not mean what they say.	(11) F7 with wild hair, post-wedding: Female: *And yet you still look so pretty! Damn you.* ;-) F7: *Awww, you're so sweet when you lie.*
Evasion	Shift credit: passing the compliment on to a third party.	(12) F64's kids and cousins: Female: *How cute is this! I can't believe they all sat and smiled at the same time! Makes me think Danielle can work miracles with kids in her studio... or your crew is just so photogenic. That could be it. Absolutely adorable!* F64: *Female -- D is good and she can work miracles with both the photography and the editing!!* :)
	Informative comment: making a comment as to the nature of that which is being complimented.	(13) F7 and sister at sister's wedding: Female: *That's a cute dress you have on (the brides is really pretty too).* F7: *I got it for $12 from Ross.*
	Ignore: replying with a comment which neither relates to the compliment nor in explicit answer to another part of the conversation.	(14) F31 and friends: Female: *Love this pic!! It was great seeing you! Oh and I'm sooo glad this shot isn't just of our teeth even though it seems like it was going to be! Haha* F31: *This picture brings me memories of the jungle gym at Roberts! Oh how time flies girls!*
	Legitimate evasion: returning to a previous part of the conversation (requires a "let out" on part of compliment giver).	(15) F161 with dogs: Female: *Awww... how cute! Isn't Grandma's house a good place to relax? My kids must not have been there that day! LOL!* F161: *Haha--I think you're right, we just had puppies to worry about that day ;)*
	Request reassurance: giving the opportunity for a further comment, ideally a reassertion of the compliment.	(16) F7's daughter on a swing: Female: *Sooo cute. Those are the perfect frames for her...but they make her look older* :(F7: *They do make her look very grown up. I couldn't stop staring at her the first day she got them.*
No acknowledgement	Non-response: the compliment is not replied to.	

The most significant modifications to Holmes' taxonomy concern those forms of communicating appreciation on FB which are limited to online contexts such as 'Like'-ing (cf. Placencia and Lower 2013) and the use of emoticons (cf. Yus 2010). Emoticons in particular are often characterised as replacing key features of orality, such as gestures and facial expressions (Herring 2007). However, fitting them into the existing taxonomy is not without controversy. Maíz-Arévalo (2013) chose to place such responses in a new branch of Holmes' (1986) taxonomy, dividing responses into explicit (using written text) and implicit (using forms such as emoticons and also the 'Like' function). This is not without merit; however, this approach makes no attempt to interpret what these new expressions mean in terms of how the compliment has been received. We feel that these features of CMD are indeed representative of the gestures and facial expressions absent in online communication, and, as such, it is possible to assign meaning to them within the existing taxonomy of compliment responses.

In terms of complimenting behaviour, the 'Like' function indicates approval or appreciation of the recipient, equivalent to a round of applause or a thumbs-up gesture (Placencia and Lower 2013). Liking something is a positive evaluation, therefore responding to a compliment with 'Like' appears to suggest acceptance of that compliment, but it could reasonably be interpreted as either a token of appreciation or of agreement. Its meaning was often clarified with an additional verbal response, as in Example 17:

(17) F31 and her fiancé

Female   *This is awesome! I love it.*
F31   *(Like) Thank you so much! Debbie did such an amazing job!*

This example was categorised as appreciation. Unfortunately it was far more common for 'Like' to appear on its own without any additional comment to contextualise it and clarify its intended meaning, as in Example 18:

(18) A picture of F168's baby with its father
Male   *You did good.*
F168   *(Like)*

In addition, many compliments comprised several supporting moves, such as explanations and well-wishing. In such cases, it is unclear what the complimentee is 'Like'-ing. In some senses, clicking 'Like' could be seen as a way of avoiding the sticky issue of exactly what to say to the compliment, evading Pomerantz's (1978) constraints altogether (Maíz-Arévalo 2013, 65).

Emoticons were similarly difficult to interpret. Where emoticons appear in conjunction with text, it becomes clear that users employ them for a variety of functions. One suggested use of emoticons is as a stand-in for facial expressions (Raymond and Steele 1993). An illustration of this is contained in Example 19 below, and, as such, the emoticon is perhaps being used to upgrade the appreciation token. It is however generally accepted that emoticons offer users a way of indicating or altering the tone of discourse (Huls 2006 in Herring 2007). This use of emoticons is apparent in Example 20 where the author seems to be using them to highlight her humorous intent.

(19) A picture of F168 and her new baby
Female   *beautiful*

F 168   *:) thank youu*

(20) F64's daughter with make up

Female: *Very pretty! Did she do this herself?!*

F64:   *You guessed it!! :) Aren't you jealous!? I can send her over to do Leighton's make up if you want!! :)*

In these examples, the verbal context of the emoticons is important to their interpretation (although it is still by no means straightforward). There were two instances where an emoticon was given as the only response to a compliment (see Example 21) and this presented similar issues to the isolated 'Like'. What did the author wish to convey?

(21) A picture of F31

Female   *Ummmm... Cutest dress ever!! :)*

F31   *;)*

The smiley face could suggest acceptance of the compliment; however, as in oral communication, a smile can be somewhat enigmatic: a polite default response, pleasure, flirtation. For this reason the use of a isolated 'Likes' or emoticons, while they are deemed to indicate acceptance of the compliment, have been counted in their own separate categories of acceptance.

Responses which include several strategies were mentioned in the introduction. Those where the strategies coincided with either acceptance, rejection, or evasion were relatively straightforward to categorise (for instance, examples (2) and (3) above).

In brief, the following considerations formed a basic approach of deciding first whether the compliment was rejected or accepted: the appearance of disagreement statements, thanks or

agreement statements, and secondly considering the effect of supporting moves: use of humour and qualifying statements which might downgrade or otherwise modify the main meaning of a response. Example 22 illustrates our approach:

(22) A picture of F7's daughter in witch costume with a new haircut

Female   *SUPER CUTE! Does she have fake eyelashes on?!*

F 7   *Yeah, she does; purple, of course* (**Evasion: legitimate evasion**)! *I wasn't sure how it would look on her but she picked the style and it really turned out well* (**Evasion: shifting credit**). *It's a swing cut, you know...with it shorter in the back* (**Evasion: informative statement**). *She loves it and so do I* (**Acceptance: agreement**).

In this example, after initially evading the compliment, F7 finishes the response with agreement statement indicating that the compliment has been accepted. The string of evasive comments were interpreted as a downgrade of the acceptance and this response was categorised as acceptance, downgrade.

Finally, it was necessary to take account of those compliments which received no reply from the recipient. Holmes (1986) does not mention any instances of compliments being completely ignored. Herbert (1989, 16), on the other hand, does note a small number of 'no acknowledgement' responses which he defines as those where the recipient "does not (verbally or non-verbally) accept the conversational turn offered". Both Cirillo (2012) and Maíz-Arévalo (2013) also mention instances of non-response to compliments. Using Herbert's term, the category of 'No acknowledgement' was introduced to account for cases of non-response.

Other studies have occasionally included a category of "unclassified" for responses which fall outside the taxonomy that they have chosen (cf. Herbert 1989; Cirillo 2012). We did not feel that any responses in this study could not be classified.

4.2.   *Results and discussion*

4.2.1. General patterns and comparison with other studies. It is notable, that from the corpus of 1057 compliments, only 205 or 19% received a response, as illustrated in Figure 3; the remainder of the compliments or 81% received no acknowledgement whatsoever.
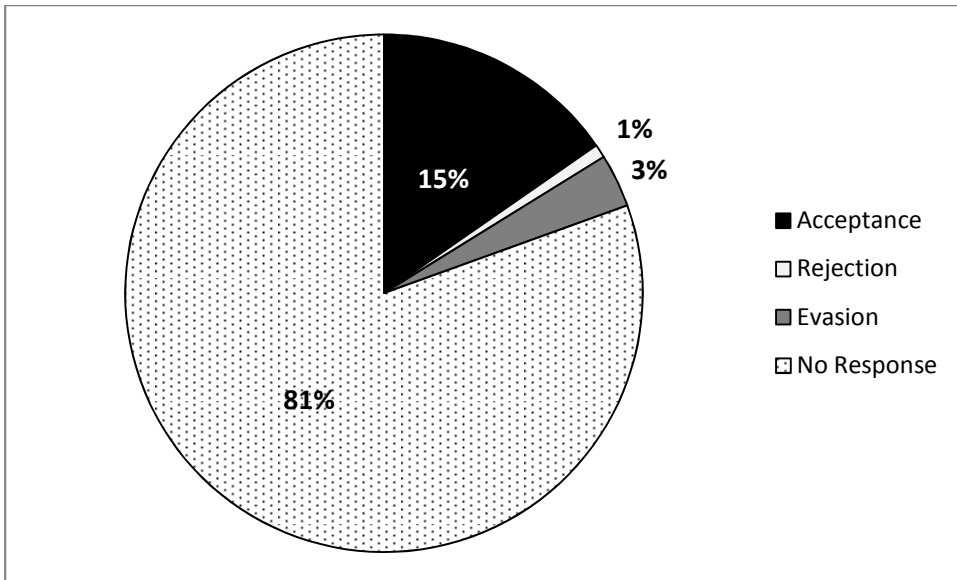
Figure 3: Responses to compliments on FB (1057 compliments)

Of the 205 compliments which did elicit a response, acceptance was by far the most frequent form of response (79%), followed by evasion (17%), with rejection making up the smallest percentage of responses (4%), as can be seen in Figure 4.
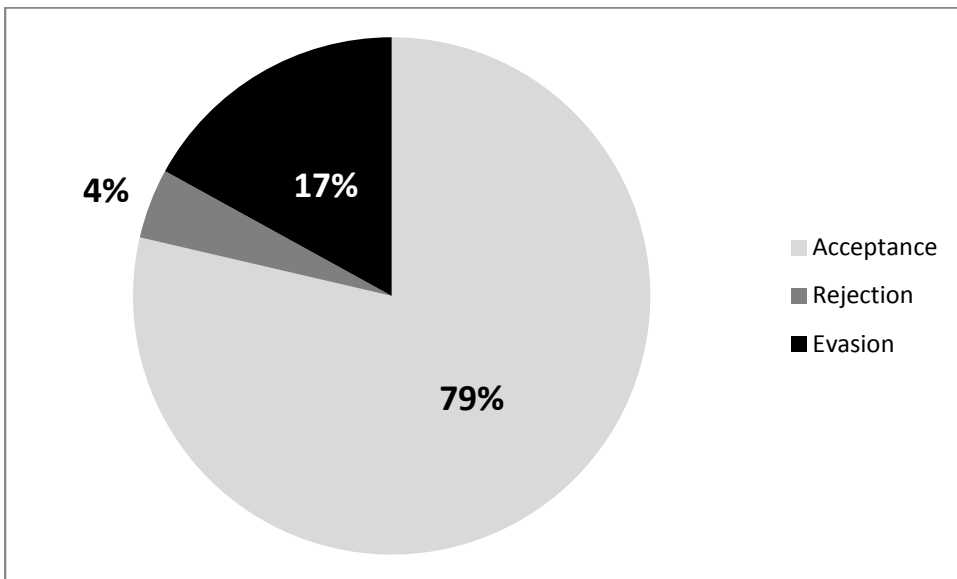

Figure 4: Types of compliment response on FB excluding non-responses (205 compliment responses)

For comparison, the data from several relevant studies on compliment responses is presented in Figure 5 below, including the overall results of the present study:
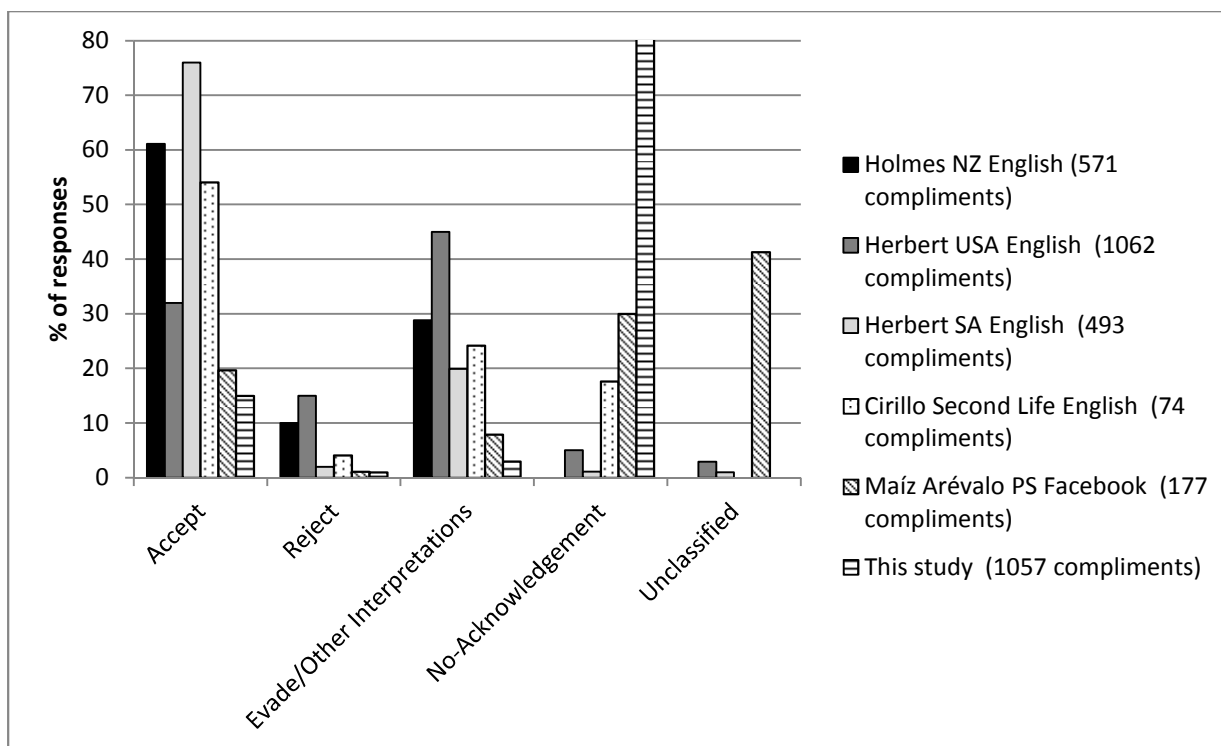
Figure 5: A comparison of compliment response patterns in this study with those found in other relevant studies, including non-responses

The data shown in this figure (Figure 5) is taken from Holmes' (1986, 495) study of New Zealand English and Herbert's (1989, 19, 21) comparison of American and South African English in face-to face encounters. Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Cirillo's (2012) CMD studies are also included. For the purposes of comparison, Herbert's 'other interpretations' have been treated as being similar to those termed 'evasion' in Holmes' taxonomy. The category "un-classified" is included as several studies recorded responses which could not be classified within whichever taxonomy they were using. Note that the large number of unclassified responses in Maíz-Arévalo's work reflects the way in which she chose to designate non-verbal responses: 'Like' and emoticons for example.

There are some similarities between the studies. Considering first the three categories: acceptance, rejection or evasion/other interpretations, all the studies show that rejection is the least favoured response whilst in all but one case (Herbert's 1989 American English data) the studies show that acceptance is the preferred response. The American English data in Herbert's (1989) study is unique in that 'other interpretations' is found to be the most preferred response (45% compared to an acceptance rate of 32%).

Where the studies differ most is in the phenomenon of non-acknowledgement. The non-response to compliments is rare in the face-to-face studies as remarked earlier; Herbert's (1989) US data shows the highest rate (5%). In our study, however, non-acknowledgement accounts for the majority of results and it is significant in both of the other CMD studies of compliment

responses: 81% of compliments in the present study elicited no response, while 30% and 17.4% elicited no response in Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Cirillo's (2012) studies, respectively. This suggests that non-response is a feature arising from the nature of the medium.

In a face-to-face interaction compliments are generally received one at a time and responded to as they arrive. On FB, one photograph can receive many compliments, which are typically viewed at a later stage. The owner of the photograph must then decide whom to answer. It may seem an unreasonable task to answer every compliment when most of them say similar things, which is precisely what some of our interviewees suggested (Section 4.2.4). This would not be an option if the compliments arrived in consecutive face-to-face encounters. This consideration makes the large instance of non-acknowledgement unsurprising. Further analysis might show that a compliment has a higher likelihood of response if it includes some other comment such as a question or reference to a shared experience as one of our interviewees suggested (Section 4.2.4).

4.2.2. Patterns of acceptance, rejection and evasion. Looking in detail at the responses given in this study certain patterns emerge. As can be seen in Figure 6, of those responses classified as accept/appreciation, 45% comprised thanks alone. The other 55% included a further informative comment or token of esteem.
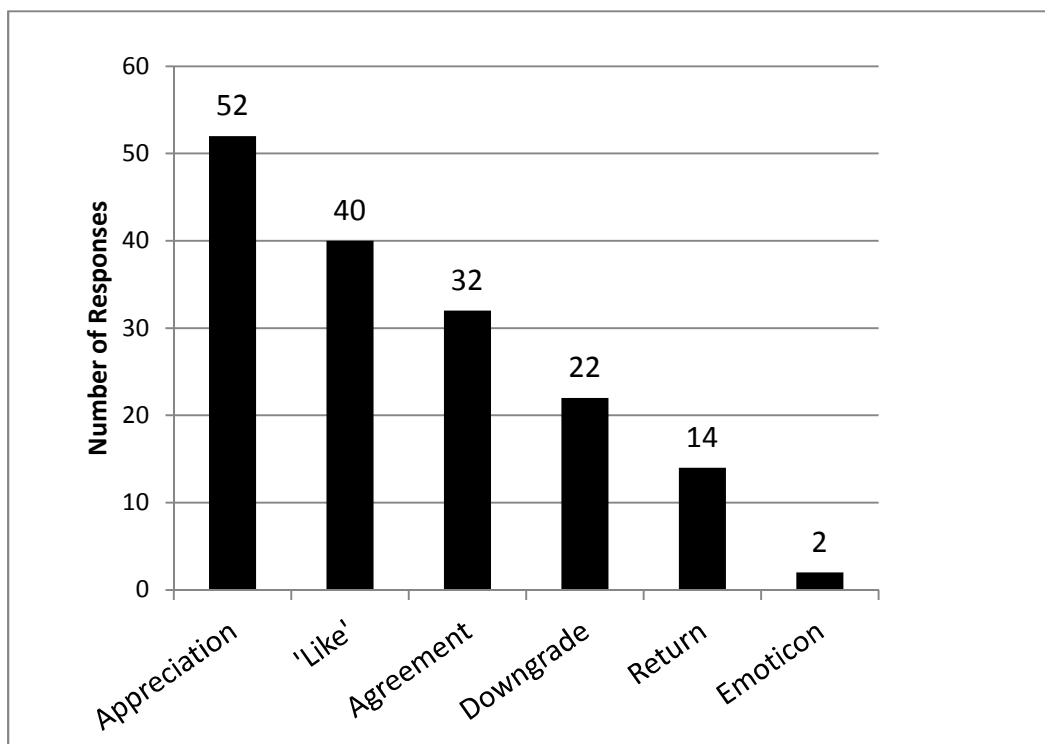

Figure 6: Forms of acceptance used overall

Amongst the acceptances there were four instances of self-praise (Example 24) and two cases of compliment upgrades (Example 25):

(24) Picture of F168 and new baby

Female: *Really..u suck u just had a kid not even two weeks ago.*

F168:   *<u>Actually 2 weeks and 1 day ago darling :))</u> But don't worry you'll be right back after you have ur boy too!!*

(25) Picture of F161's dog

Female: *Lol ~ but I'll concede that he's awfully cute ~ for, ya know...one of those dogs! :)*

F161:   *He is, in fact, <u>the cutest dog ever</u>-thank you for recognizing!*

Within the category of acceptance, the use of medium-specific responses was highly prevalent: 26% of acceptances involved the use of the 'Like' function alone. This makes 'Like'-ing the second most used acceptance strategy and the third most prevalent response form overall. After acceptance, evasion was the next most common response type. Of the available five evasion strategies, two were particularly dominant. The majority of evasions (46%) were accomplished using the legitimate evasion strategy (see Example 15 in Table 1) and the only other strategy used with significant frequency (26%) was the informative comment (see Example 13 also in Table 1). Other strategies each formed a very small proportion of the sample.

Rejections made up by far the smallest proportion of responses. Only two forms of rejection were observed: disagreement or challenging sincerity (Examples 10 and 11, respectively, in Table 1). These were each used with similar frequencies.

In this data, 47% of the responses contained multiple strategies. Some examples are included in section 4, along with a description of how they were analysed (4.1). The examples show something rather like the negotiations described by Maíz-Arévalo (2010) in her paper considering Peninsular Spanish compliment responses. Her data concerned face-to-face interactions and she points out that they appear to be quite unlike the straight-forward formulae observed in previous studies amongst English speakers. Rather than a compliment followed by a single response, interactions in Maíz-Arévalo's (2010) study took the form of a prolonged negotiation, often beginning in rejection with an ultimate acceptance after many turns.

On FB, these complex responses might be a response to the medium: unlike in spoken discourse, FB users do not take turns. Comments are posted in the order they arrive and there are also many potential participants in any one interaction. Both these aspects cause some degree of disruption to the natural flow of discourse and as a result FB users may be condensing what might have taken place over several turns of a spoken conversation into a single, computer-mediated turn.

The challenges of CMD compared to oral discourse are explored by Herring (2001) who discusses how users adapt their conversational style to manage these issues, by, for example, the increased use of addressivity. This was a phenomenon first noted by Werry (1996) whilst studying Internet-Relay-Chat (IRC) where multiple participants can join a conversation. On the other hand, Merrison et al. (2012) consider the effects of asynchronous communication specifically in their study of requesting behaviour in emails. They describe e-mails as a "one-shot" process (a term coined by Clark 1996) in which supplicants must achieve all their goals in a single e-mail: both communicating their request and generating adequate rapport (Merrison et al. 2012, 1081). In combination with the lack of paralinguistic cues available in face-to-face communication, the one-shot aspect of e-mails means that users take great care in the composition of their requests leading to a tendency to over-emphasise the usual norms of politeness customary within a particular group, as shown in Duthler's (2006) work comparing email and voicemail.

If, as Pomerantz (1978) contends, there is an understanding that acceptance is the culturally expected response to a compliment in English, then the reiteration of acceptance strategies, which is evident in the data (see Examples 2 and 3) could well be seen as an over-emphasis of the usual norms of politeness. Where the contradictory strategies of acceptance and evasion are used (see Example 23) it could be argued that users are attempting to address both the preference for acceptance and self-praise avoidance. Trying to cover all bases in one go is perhaps another more nuanced instance of over-sensitivity to accepted cultural norms as users deliberate over how best to respond to the compliments received.

4.2.3. Style and frequency of response amongst participants. As has been discussed, participants frequently ignored compliments and failed to respond. Thus, it seemed worthwhile exploring whether users varied in their response frequency. What seems apparent from Figure 7 below is that in terms of total number of responses, participants are quite similar regardless of how many compliments they received. The majority of participants responded to between 5 and 30 compliments. Participants F31 and F181 stand out as the users who made most responses (64) and the least responses (0). In the case of F31 it could be said that the high response rate is a result of the large number of compliments received, however F64 received a similarly large number and answered only 30.
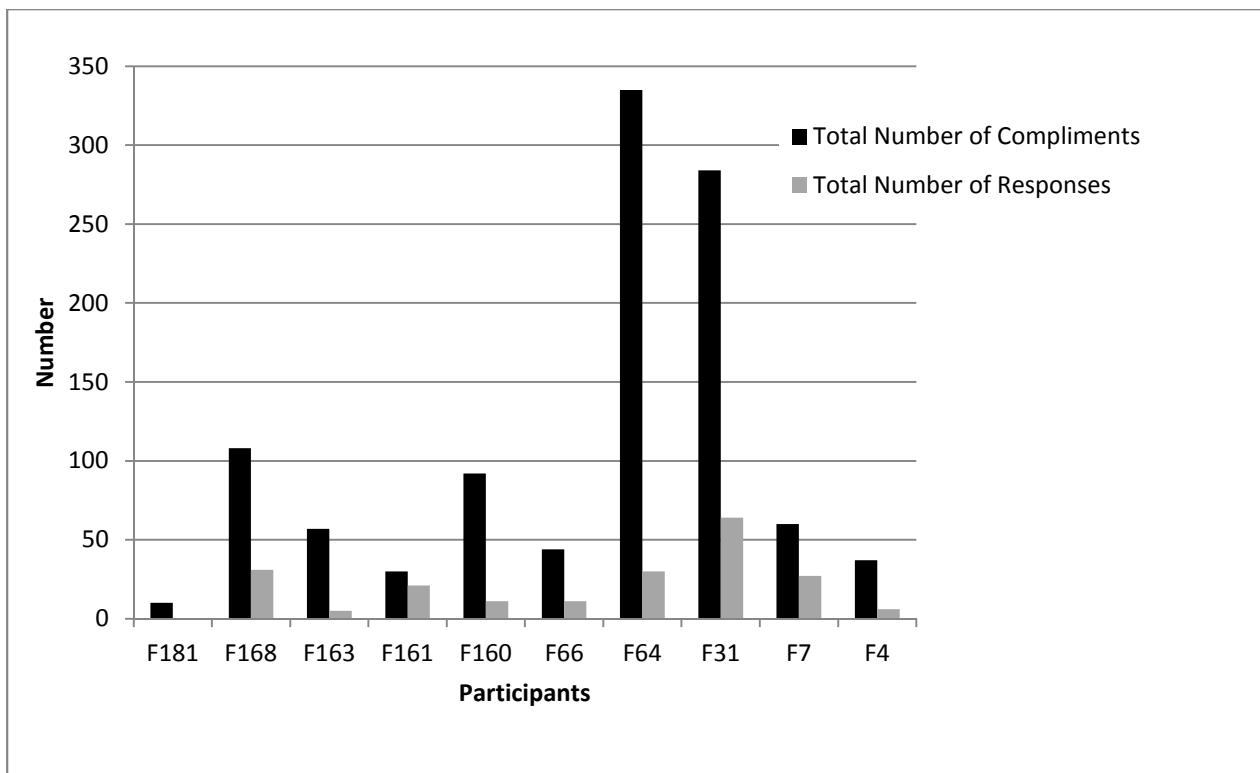
Figure 7: A comparison of compliments given and responses received

The similarities in response rate may simply be a reflection of the similar amounts of time spent by participants in maintaining their FB pages. The majority of the responses in the sample were made personally (93%) and of these 20.4% used the name of the originator of the compliment thus displaying addressivity. Individually, users were similar in their rates of addressivity (15-20%) except for F64 who used names in 52% of her responses. Only 7% of responses were classified as 'collective', where the respondent used terms such as *"Thanks guys!! :)"* or *"Thanks everyone! :)"* (both examples from F64) to indicate that they are responding to contributions from many people. Here the two participants with the most responses were, unsurprisingly, the biggest users of collective responses: F31 and F64 jointly account for 93% of this type of response. It is interesting that F64 also used the highest levels of addressivity.

4.2.4. Appropriateness of (non)-response from the perspective of FB users. One of our key findings, as noted in the previous sections, is that a very large proportion of compliments in the corpus examined, namely, 81%, did not receive a response. As previously remarked, this stands in stark contrast with face-to-face interactions where a response is normally expected, showing that there are different notions of appropriate behaviour in the two contexts. In order to complement our findings from observational data on FB and in an effort to gain some understanding of compliment response behaviour on FB from users' perspective, we carried out informal, semi-structured interviews with a group of 15 Midwestern American students,

aged between 18 and 40 (see Section 3). The interviews started with a question on users'
practices on FB: When you post a photo on FB and a friend writes something nice about it, like
a compliment, do you reply to your friend's positive comments? The ensuing questions were
aimed at eliciting their perception of (in)appropriate behaviour on FB:

a. Why is it important to reply to those positive comments? (for those who say they usually
    reply to them)
b. In face-to-face interaction, a response to a compliment is normally expected. Why is it
    different on FB? (for those who indicated they normally did not produce a reply), and
    finally,
c. Is it rude not to reply to a compliment that you receive for a photo on FB? (to check
    against answers given to the first question)

With respect to the initial question (When you post a photo on FB and a friend writes
something nice about it, like a compliment, do you reply to your friend's positive comments?)
there were a few categorical yes's or no's, as can be seen in Table 2 below. However, most of
the replies (10 out of 15) acknowledge that there can be some variation in response behaviour.

Table 2: Basic answer to question '… do you reply to your [FB] friend's positive comments?

Answer	Male interviewees	Female interviewees	Total
Yes.	0	3	3
Yes, usually	4	3	7
Sometimes	1	0	1
Not usually	1	1	2
No	1	1	2
Total	7	8	15

The probing of the reasons behind the initial answers led to uncovering a number of
microsocial and other factors that appear to influence people's compliment response behaviour
on FB. They include the following:

1. The degree of social distance between the FB friends: among close friends or family
    members, our interviewees indicate that there is a higher expectation of an answer, whether
    as a 'Like' or as a comment. The expectation decreases with people they don't know (very)
    well: "if it's someone that I don't think I know that well, I just ignore it [the compliment]"
    (female 6, 22).

2. The amount of time elapsed since the last encounter/communication with the FB friend: if they have not talked or communicated for a while with the person posting the comment, then a reply may be more relevant.

3. The amount of time elapsed since the comment was posted: Postings, like news stories, appear to have a limited shelf life. If they are not picked up soon after they were posted, or at least on the day they were posted, a response seems to become irrelevant: "someone can see your reply a day or two later you know … and it would be kind of pointless to say something or 'Like' something then" (male 5, 20). According to this interviewee, a general rule he follows is to reply to postings received within "the last couple of hours" since after that, the newsworthiness of the posting has "passed", and "after like a day, you don't want to respond to that, it's kind of old news". Responses after a certain period of time may even begin to fall under the category of "creepy" (male 6, 26) as they can imply that someone is going through a user's profile. In other words, a comment on an old photo would suggest some kind of stalking, with an infringement on the person's space. According to the same student (male 6, 26), comments are most relevant for a response when they are in people's newsfeed. These comments illustrate immediacy as a salient feature of communication on Facebook.

4. FB friends' level of sociability/activity on FB. One of our interviewees observes that not everyone responds and that this depends on "how social you are". He points out that "some people try to limit their time on FB"; therefore, they would not be on FB on a regular basis to see and to reply to comments as they arrive (male 1, 21). Another interviewee points to what Li (2007) refers to as 'levels of activity' in social-digital environments, that is, how active people are: "some people don't use FB much so they might not see it [the comment or comments that others have posted] " (female 4, 20). Two related comments focus on how busy people are in their off-line lives as a factor influencing response behaviour on FB: "Sometimes people don't reply if they don't have time. They are just too busy." (female 5, 40). "When I am on my way to class, I might get a notification and it may slip my mind" (male 3, 19). Another factor mentioned relating to levels of FB activity is the device users employ to access FB: smart phones are cited as a reason for increased activity.

5. The number of comments received: most participants agree that if they have a large number of comments to deal with, they may opt for just 'Like'-ing them, rather than commenting back, whereas a few indicated that they would simply ignore them altogether.

6. The content of the comment: For better chances of a response, the comment appears to need to stand out in some ways. One of our interviewees, for example, indicated that if the comment is "really detailed and specific" she "might write back" whereas she might only 'Like' it if was something ordinary such as "nice" (female 6, 22). Along the same lines, a male interviewee (male 2, 38) observes that "most people write things like 'that's cool' or 'that's neat'" which in his view do not merit a response. While compliments of this type to him represent "a slight acknowledgement" of the posting / the author of the posting, he thinks that they are "pretty worthless" and, therefore, he does not reply to them. Finally, others pointed out that they would only reply if the positive comment / compliment included a question: "If I posted a picture of a beach and someone said 'what a cool picture!', I personally wouldn't say anything, but I would reply if it [the comment] included a question like 'where did you go?' (male 7, 20).

7. The place on FB where the comment was posted: For some, there is a stronger requirement to reply to postings that appear on one's wall: "If someone has posted something on your wall, I feel you have to make an effort, that is, to acknowledge it" (male 5, 20).

Among those interviewees who indicated that they (usually) responded to compliments, when asked why it was important to provide a response, some notion of politeness surfaces explicitly in some cases, as in the following comments, pointing to norms of appropriateness:

"If you go through the effort of giving a compliment, it is polite to say thank you or respond in some way." (male 1, 21).
"You should reply. It's polite." (female 5, 40).

In fact, the first of these comments above points to a norm of reciprocity (cf. Uehara 1995) in operation and so do other comments like the following:

"Generally, it's nice to say something back, at least 'Like' it." (male 5, 20)

For others, a response particularly in the form of a 'Like' seems to simply represent a token of acknowledgement and/or appreciation, similar to the 'Likes' given in response to postings of photos (cf. Placencia and Lower 2013):

"Part of it [the meaning of 'Like'] is that you saw it [the positive comment] and that you appreciated it" (male 4, 19).
"I know what you said, I saw it. You acknowledge it." (male 5, 20)

The interviewee making this last comment indicates that "if you do not respond", people may ask you "did you see it?" so the 'Like'-ing anticipates this kind of questioning. The 'Like'-ing in this case seems to involve a practical or instrumental element.

In response to the last question (Is it rude not to reply to a compliment that you receive for a photo on FB?) only two interviewees provided an affirmative, but hedged answer. One of them said it was "kind of rude, a little bit, but not extreme" (female 4, 20); the other one implied it was impolite when he expressed that the absence of a response would cause him some upset, anger or disappointment, but not much at all: "I wouldn't be terribly upset. I wouldn't be too mad, maybe a little disappointed, but I'm not going to take it too personal" (male 5, 20). The rest of our interviewees, on the other hand, indicated that it was not necessary or always appropriate to provide an answer. For some, this is so, because "FB is just social networking" and "it's not as interactive" as face-to-face encounters when you are "just behind a keyboard" (male 6, 26). The following comment seems to summarise the attitude most interviewees ultimately have: "people have other lives than FB; if they don't reply, … it's not that big of a deal" (male 3, 19).

It has to be pointed out that among those interviewees who initially indicated that replies are a must, some contradictions surfaced when they replied to the question on whether it was rude not to reply to a compliment. For instance female 5, aged 40, while initially stressing that it is *polite* to reply and that one *should* reply, later said: "No, it's not necessary [to reply]. You don't have time. No one wants to read that [the replies to replies] either". Her initial comments seem to reflect what she perhaps regards as the ideal norm, possibly borrowed from face-to-face contexts, or that she wants to come across as a polite person in her interviewer's eyes, rather than actual behaviour. The latter is what is probably reflected in her second set of comments.

Interestingly, some notion of self-politeness (Chen 2001) or impoliteness seems to surface in the responses given by those who do not reply to compliments, or who limit their responses to 'Likes'. One of the reasons given for not replying is to avoid looking as though the person is fishing for more compliments:

"It seems like it gets redundant. If I reply to my friend's comment it's like I would … unnecessarily be trying to support a behaviour that benefits me by responding to a friend's comments. Now, if a friend responds negatively, I may respond to him trying to understand why, but a positive response, if I respond to them, I'm just trying to elicit more positive responses." (male 2, 38)

He goes on to say:

"They have already said something, it's adding an extra variable to something that is already (there) so you are using a positive reinforcement to elicit a behaviour you like and, you know, that can be seen either manipulative or attention-seeking kind of behaviour." (male 2, 38)

This person seems to be concerned about protecting his self-image, a kind of self-politeness (Chen 2001) through response avoidance in this case. However, he also regards responding as a possible imposition to himself (again, a concern for self-politeness) in cases where he may have too many comments to reply to:

"... everybody now saying something on my picture and then expecting a response and I got to respond every time … it becomes a pain …" (male 2, 38)

Avoidance of imposition is also behind female 5's comment above when she says that "No one wants to read that [the replies to replies] either". In her case, however, she appears to be alluding to Chen's (2001) notion of 'other politeness' (vis-à-vis self-politeness), i.e., being considerate to others by not imposing your replies to replies on them. Group replies (see Section 4.2.3) appear to be one way of avoiding placing an imposition on oneself or on others:

"Group replies are better because you get a notification every time [someone posts a comment or a 'Like'] and you don't want to get too many notifications on your phone, your laptop and maybe through other devices" (male 4, 19).

"It would take an awful long time to say thank you to each and every person, you know … It's too time-consuming. It's too much effort for a social media." (male 5, 20)

"I think replying to each individual comment can be a little excessive and unnecessary so I feel that group replies are better". (female 8, 18)

However, while group replies may reduce possible impositions on people's time and effort, for some, the benefit of using such responses needs to be weighed out against potential loss at the interpersonal level in that group responses are regarded as "impersonal":

"I don't like group replies. I think that they are impersonal and I'm not sure if they [your FB friends] are really meant to tell you or if you just happen to be on their list. Of course it saves time, but it's a step away from being personable." (male 2, 38).

On the other hand, another interviewee, while noting the "less personal" character of group replies, does not think they are inappropriate, and in fact, to him, they appear to offer a solution for dealing precisely with people one does not know (well):

> "It is a bit less personal. People have so many friends on Facebook; they have people that they don't even know, so it's kind of an easy way." (male 3, 19)

A related observation is made by a female (female 8, 18) when she says that group replies can be better sometimes as "you don't want to leave anyone out". By anyone she refers to both good friends she would normally reply to as well as others who are "not as good friends" who she would not normally feel inclined to reply to.

In brief, the interviews carried out for the present study allowed us to identify a range of possible factors behind the high frequency of non-response to compliments behaviour that we identified in our corpus. They include microsocial and other factors, some of which are similar to what one would find in face-to-face contexts (e.g. the degree of social distance between the FB friends; the amount of time elapsed since the last encounter) and some of which appear to be specific to sociodigital environments like Facebook (e.g. levels of activity of FB users).

5. Conclusions

Compliments and compliment responses in CMC are an emerging area of research that has already shown promise as a rich topic for investigation. While there are many studies of compliments and compliment responses in a face-to-face environment in numerous languages and language varieties, we are only beginning to scratch the surface of this topic in CMC. There are many different types of CMC to explore, and for this investigation, we have chosen FB, a currently popular form of CMC.

In this study, we noted that, contrary to what is expected in face-to-face interactions, compliments on FB rarely receive responses. Indeed, only 19% of compliments in our study received responses (research question 1). This figure differs substantially from that given in Maíz-Arévalo's (2013) study of compliment responses on FB, in which 70% of compliments in her corpus received responses. This could have something to do with how the study participants were chosen, however. It could also potentially relate to the language difference: our study focuses on American English and Maíz-Arévalo's study focuses on Peninsular Spanish. An interesting follow-up would be to examine compliment responses in a random

selection of Peninsular Spanish speakers to see whether the response rate corresponds to Maíz-Arévalo's handpicked corpus.

We observed that, excluding the phenomenon on non-response, a 79%[4] majority of compliments were accepted, in line with results from several face-to-face studies on compliment responses in English (cf. Holmes' 1986 study of New Zealand English and Herbert's 1989 study of South African English). We noted that only 4%[5] of the compliments that received a response were rejected which is a substantially smaller proportion than in some studies of English compliment responses in face-to-face interactions (cf. Herbert's 1989 American English) but in line with the general finding of these studies that rejection is the least favoured strategy overall (research question 3a). We suggest that this may be due to the medium: on FB, it appears to be less important for users to try to avoid self-praise. After all, there seems to be little purpose of posting photographs of one's life if not to provoke praise from 'friends'.

The participants in our study used several methods of accepting compliments. Showing appreciation, specifically, saying 'thanks', was used most commonly, followed by 'Like'-ing compliments, agreeing with compliments, downgrading compliments, returning compliments, and finally, responding to compliments with simply an emoticon (see Section 4.2.2).

In this study, we observed that the majority of responses by the participants were made to individual compliments (as opposed to one collective response to various compliments), and of those, one-fifth used the complimentor's name in the response, thus indicating a relatively high rate of addressivity (research question 3b). The participants here did use collective responses, though not frequently: only 6% of responses in our corpus were collective. The users in our study who had received the most compliments used collective responses most frequently which is in line with the results from our interviews.

In order to get a fuller picture of the norms of responding to compliments on FB, we conducted face-to-face interviews with Midwestern university students. Although these interviews were not with the same participants from whom we drew the data, the interviewees had similar demographic backgrounds and therefore serve as a reliable indicator of general attitudes on the subject. When quizzed about their personal behaviour of responding to compliments on FB, while the majority (87%) said that they either definitely respond to compliments, or at least sometimes respond to compliments, they all showed awareness of different factors that play a part in deciding whether to respond to compliments, including, but not limited to: the quantity of compliments received; the quality of compliments received; and where the compliment occurs (on the user's Wall or on a photograph) (research question 2). Some users, rather intriguingly, brought up the issue of time, as in, if too much time has elapsed between when the compliment was made and when a response can be made, then a response to that compliment becomes inappropriate. This could have to do with the underlying

maxim of avoiding self-praise. To illustrate: if a user receives a compliment on 1 January, and then responds to the compliment on 1 March, for example, the user could be seen as trying to revive episodes of past praise, perhaps in order to ignite new praise. This would likely never be a concern in a face-to-face scenario, probably because interactions happen in real time, rather than in an asynchronous fashion, as on FB. However, this suggestion of the appropriateness of responding further emphasises the difference between CMD and face-to-face communication.

The range of responses about whether and when it is (not) appropriate to provide a response, and what form this response should take (i.e., a Like or a Comment) bring to mind Watts's (2003, 11) notion of *discursive struggle*, that is, the struggle that goes on over what is regarded as (in)appropriate behaviour. This struggle on FB could be related to people's level of activity, though two participants in our study had posted hundreds of photographs, indicating active FB use, and very few responses to compliments. It is interesting to note how some interviewees suggested that in some instances, responding to a compliment on FB may not be appropriate.

The interview responses provided suggest that, with very few exceptions, FB users do not have the same expectations in terms of compliment response behaviour as in face-to-face interaction. In fact, interviewees seemed mindful that there are numerous possible constraints in operation that make responses to compliments (and possibly to other comments) less likely on FB compared to face-to-face contexts. Therefore, on the whole, different norms of appropriateness seem to be in place so FB users are generally not judged as rude for not responding to compliments on FB as they would be in a face-to-face context. Expectations are higher, however, when it comes to someone's closer circle of friends. Fraser and Nolen's (1981) or Levinson's (1979) notion of rights and obligations comes to mind in the sense that there seems to be the expectation that close friends should support each other on FB, and that one way of doing this is by acknowledging each other's postings. This, however, is different for compliments in face-to-face interactions, which frequently happen between strangers to smooth social interactions between new acquaintances.

In brief, as we have seen in the data from this study, not all norms of face-to-face communication are carried over to CMD. While giving compliments happens frequently on FB, as in real life, the other side of the interaction, that is, responding to compliments received, does not follow face-to-face interactions very closely. At first glance, the medium should lend itself well to compliment responses: users have time to consider compliments and formulate responses. Additionally, because compliments are not occurring in real time, perhaps within a group of people, those receiving compliments may feel more at ease to accept compliments. We have seen, however, that while some constraints of responding to compliments in face-to-face interactions do carry over to interactions on FB (e.g., minimising self-praise), others, such

as responding to compliments, do not. While initially this may seem surprising, interviews with FB users highlight that the nature of communication on FB is most likely the cause of this.

There is still much research to be done in this area. It would be interesting to find out whether compliment response rates by males on FB differ substantially from those of females on FB. Additionally, another area of exploration is whether compliment response rates differ across various forms of CMC. After possibilities in one language are explored, comparisons between languages would shed some light on the subject. For example, examining whether there is there a significant difference between compliment response rates of speakers of American English and, say, speakers of British English. The possibilities are seemingly endless and all important for understanding developing trends in politeness as society shifts more and more to living life online.

Endnotes

[1] Werry (1996, 52-53) coins the term "addressivity" to describe how users of Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where conversations often involve multiple participants, have developed the convention of inserting the name of their intended addressee followed by a colon at the start of their comment. In the context of IRC "addressivity" is a method of attracting attention and this is perhaps less necessary on FB, however it might be deemed to make responses more personal and allow users to achieve a greater degree of intimacy.
[2] Second Life is a role-playing game in which users interact via an avatar within an online environment comprising virtual analogues of real-world settings.
[3] All participants in our study were given an alphanumeric code to protect their identity: F or M to identify Female and Male participants plus a number.
[4] 15% of full corpus.
[5] 1% of full corpus.

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